"A Commitment to Excellence
PASTG
for the 21st Century!"

NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

By Sherri Buxton, MWA Office, Peoria, IL, and Heather Lewandowski, Columbia, MO

The Directors of the Midwest Area Office and the Program Administrative Support Task Group (PASTG) are happy to announce that an Area-wide Program Administrative Support meeting is tentatively planned for October, 2004. Please mark your calendar for the week of October 25-29 as the *tentative dates* for this meeting. This meeting will be mandatory for all RL secretaries and highly encouraged for office automation support staff. We will post additional information regarding this meeting on our website located at www.mwa.ars.usda.gov/pastg.

RPES SUBMISSION CHANGES

By Brittney Mernick, Peoria, IL

The RPES submission process has recently been updated. Beginning in April, requests for case writeups in the FY 2005 review schedule will require the changes. Following are suggestions to make the transition easier:

- Adobe Acrobat 6.0!
- Document feeding, two-sided scanner (Try an HP ScanJet 8250). A flat-lid scanner will require hours of one-page-at-a-time scanning.
- Only two exhibits are allowed per *Demonstrated Accomplishment*.
- Only two *Additional Accomplishments* are allowed.
- All accomplishments can only be a half page each. No exceptions!
- Label Factor I-IV file: *B.Mernick Writeup*.
- Most sections of *Factor IV* have either been changed or eliminated. Read this section of the new guidelines carefully.
- Performance Awards are no longer allowed to be listed.
- Publications are now divided into two sections: *Peer-reviewed* and *Other*.
- No Abstracts! (Everyone cheer!)
- Make all changes/updates in the MSWord file before converting to .pdf (file increases in size when changes are made in Adobe Acrobat).
- You may convert your MSWord file to .pdf as many times as you need.
- Label exhibits with stickers or typed text before scanning.
- Scan the exhibits directly to file (.pdf). This will eliminate having to paste individual page images into an MSWord document before converting the file to .pdf.
- Label exhibit file: *Exhibit 1a*.

The text length and other guidelines that were previously a *suggestion* are now a *requirement*. The RPES Staff will no longer be accepting writeups that are too long or give more information than allowed.

Overall, the new Factor I-IV writeup is much more concise. It is easier to read and edit for mistakes; also, deleting the abstracts eliminates a lot of proofreading work. Finally, using a document feeding, two-sided scanner means exhibits can be scanned in minutes.

CHANGING FACES

Lori Wilson-Voss

Lori Wilson-Voss has accepted an Accounting Technician position with Carol Moran, Location Administrative Officer, Ames, Iowa. She will begin her new position on March 22, 2004. Lori served as Supervisory Program Support Assistant at the North Central Regional Plant Introduction Station (NCRPIS), Ames, Iowa. She also served as Co-chair on the Midwest Program Administrative Support Task Group (PASTG) since its establishment in 1995. In 1999, Lori joined the National Secretarial Advisory Council as the Midwest Area representative and Co-chair of the committee. She also served as the Technical Advisor to the Midwest Area PASTG. In 1997, she was selected as the Midwest Area Secretary of the Year. Lori has most recently served as the editor of the Standard Operating Procedure manual (SOP) for the Midwest Area. As one of the founding members of the PASTG, Lori played a key role in the success of the group. She will be greatly missed not only at the NCRPIS but also by members of the PASTG. We wish her the best of luck in her new endeavor.

Julie Grogan

Ms. Grogan joined the Administrative Office of USDA-ARS in Madison, Wisconsin in January, 2004. Ms. Grogan attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is a life member of the American College of Healthcare Administrators Foundation, and is a certified trainer/ instructor for the American Red Cross and CBRF Fire Safety Training. Before joining ARS, Ms. Grogan was involved in the private sector industry where for the past 10 years she owned and operated multiple assisted living communities for the elderly throughout the state of Wisconsin. In addition, Ms. Grogan worked for 8 years in the financial division of a national hospital management and healthcare consulting company and 4 years managing a travel agency.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY

By Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, MI

The National Agricultural Library (NAL) was established by the U.S. Congress to serve America as a primary agricultural resource. As the largest agricultural library in the world, its mission is “to ensure and enhance access to agricultural information for a better quality of life.” As a national resource, the NAL works to collect, preserve and distribute knowledge that is fundamental to the continued well-being and growth of U.S. agriculture, contributing to the development of food supplies for the nation and the world.

The NAL provides the world with leadership by developing and applying information technology and ensuring that agricultural information will be available to those who need it. The global information infrastructure grows faster and reaches farther every day and the NAL has moved rapidly to take advantage of this new opportunity to reach its customers. In addition to providing services based on its collection of printed materials, the NAL has led the development of electronic information services for more than thirty years.

AgNIC is a guide to quality agricultural information on the Internet as selected by the NAL, Land-Grant Universities, and other institutions. Another beneficial resource available through the NAL website is Agricola.

For more details about the NAL and its services, contact the National Agricultural Library at 301-504-5755 or agref@nal.usda.gov or visit www.nal.gov.

PARKINSON'S LAW

By Sandy Groneberg, Morris, MN

Parkinson's Law says "work expands to fill up all available time." I enjoy my job (a good thing!); but as a result, I tend to strictly adhere to Parkinson's law (a bad thing!).

If work expands to fill up all available time, it does no good to ask for more time-it will still be filled with work! So, I went in search of ideas to become more organized, hoping that I could start controlling the work instead of the work controlling me.

Following is a list of things I found:

- *Simplify*: Extra things and activities waste energy, time, and space. Now the challenge is to take this thought, and decide what to do with the information. For example, which things and activities waste my time? Do I make unnecessary trips to the copier instead of doing several jobs at one time? Do I spend too much time searching my piles of work to find a piece of paper I need for a project? What clutter do I need to clear in order to be more efficient? *Tip*: Always keep things close to the place where they will be used, with the most frequently used items being the most easily reached.

- *Set realistic goals* and have clear and concise objectives to meet those goals. Use a month-at-a-glance calendar to help prioritize tasks for each day, setting aside time for priority tasks before they become unmanageable. Concentrate time and efforts on one task at a time-don't let less important tasks sidetrack you from high priority items. Control interruptions-It is easy to let others dictate your priority list; but you know your work load, so make sure that you set your own priority list and stick to it. If you're feeling overwhelmed, divide complex tasks into manageable sub-tasks. Train yourself to go down your "To Do List" without skipping over the difficult items. *Tip*: If you tend to drift from your priorities, set specific time limits and use your computer's alarm or timer to remind you every hour or half-hour to stay on track. Frequently ask yourself: "What is the best use of my time right now?" Be aware of time robbers: Side-trackers, procrastination, daydreaming and laziness.

- *Important*: Don't waste time feeling guilty about what you didn't do. It's gone now; move ahead. Try not to think of work on weekends.

- *Manage the paper load*. Keep all notes to yourself in a single place, whether in a notebook, a paper organizer, or on your computer. Try to handle paper only once by making a decision about it the first time it crosses your desk. *Tip*: While reading a letter, or instructions, mark the items that require an action to avoid re-reading the entire document again. Keep files vertical whenever possible to avoid the habit of piling papers.

- *Manage the computer*. Use disk optimization/defragmentation software regularly. It saves disk space, speeds up software, and reduces computer errors. Backup regularly-you don't want to redo something you spent hours preparing the first time. *Tip*: Learn short cuts and macros for the software you use. Keep on top of the latest technology.

- *Manage yourself*. Pay attention to your health, diet and sleep. Take your full lunch period: eat a light lunch and then take a walk so that you don't get sleepy in the afternoon. Use the subconscious mind to think while walking, jogging, etc. Keep paper and pencil by your bed to jot down ideas before you have a chance to lose them. You will sleep better if you write down your idea and then forget about it than if you try to remember it until morning. Examine old habits for possible elimination or streamlining. *Tip*: Try to find a new technique each day that helps gain time - make it a mental challenge on your drive to or from work. Telephone instead of writing. Delegate work when possible, but use a follow-up system. Communicate clearly and be specific to eliminate having to redo things. Minimize meetings. Develop a routine for general procedures. Take concise notes - not novels. Keep track of your mood on a calendar and plan time to do things that make you feel good. Take time to make someone else happy; it will keep you positive. Plan a quiet hour for yourself every day.

WEEKLY REPORT

Each week an e-mail report is due to the Area Office. This is to notify Headquarters of any outside activities such as meetings, invited talks, request for information by congressional representatives, press inquiries, freedom of information requests, or awards. Negative responses are also required. The secretary and Research Leader should meet each week to decide what information should be submitted. Send the report to Sherri Buxton at sbuxton@mwa.ars.usda.gov by close of business each Wednesday.

March

- Spring Clean-up on 425s ONLY.
- Watch for letter from Area Office to initiate ARMP process.
- Solicit SYs for equipment, travel, and personnel needs for the Annual Resource Management Plan (ARMP). Provide

information to RL for narrative section of the ARMP.

- Performance Cycle for CAT 5, 7, 8, & 9 personnel ends March 31.

April

- Type performance elements on Performance Appraisal (Electronic AD-435) for CAT 5, 7, 8 & 9 personnel. Distribute to supervisors with instructions for completion.
- Prepare new Performance Standards and Individual Development Plan (IDP form ARS-48). These must be in place by June 6, 2004, to be considered a full performance appraisal period.

NON-ARS AUTHORS ON 115's

ARIS will recognize when listed authors on a 115 are not ARS employees, and the "cleared" box must be checked for each non-ARS author before a 115 can be submitted electronically for approval. Please note that by checking the "cleared" box, submitters are indicating that non-ARS authors have reviewed and approved the interpretive summary (if provided), technical abstract, and are indicating that cooperators are authorizing release of their affiliation in the submission to Tektran. Although ARS does not uniformly require documentation by the submitter, it is recommended that submitters of 115s keep notes or e-mail correspondences in the manuscript file to refute potential criticism from co-authors.

REQUIRED SOURCES FOR PURCHASING

Listed *in order* are sources you need to consider when making purchases:

- Excess property
- www.jwod.com
- www.boisecascade.com
- www.gsaadvantage.gov
- Open market

REE DIRECTORY

Add/update your REE Directory on a regular basis to ensure ARS personnel information is current.